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ABSTRACT

Twenty-eight counties of southern and eastern Ohio are part of federally-defined Appalachia. This paper considers whether or not the identity of people in this area is Appalachian, Midwestern, or just plain rural. These counties lie in the unglaciated section of the Allegheny plateau, characterized by steep valleys, narrow ridges, and coal deposits. The area is more densely forested and less suited to agriculture than the rest of Ohio. Per capita income is $9,796, compared with Ohio's mean of $12,052. Many of the area's problems are similar to those of the rest of Appalachia: a high poverty rate, high unemployment, a shortage of physicians, substandard housing, and the departure of youth to employment opportunities elsewhere. The population displays many characteristics congruent with Appalachian identity: strong sense of place, independence, neighborliness, self-reliance, hospitality, familism, strong kinship ties, and "mountain" speech patterns. In 1989 the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service will survey 13 counties to determine the extent of Appalachian identification and cultural awareness among southern Ohioans. Results will be used to tailor extension education programs to the cultural context of this clientele. The paper contains 15 references and an Appalachian reading list with 48 entries. (SV)

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APPALACHIA OR THE MIDWEST?

APPALACHIAN CULTURAL AWARENESS IN SOUTHERN OHIO

A Paper Presented at the

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APPALACHIA OR THE MIDWEST?

APPALACHIAN CULTURAL AWARENESS IN SOUTHERN OHIO

Although one often thinks of Appalachia as being located south of the Mason-Dixon Line and of the Ohio River, significant portions of such northeastern states as Pennsylvania and New York and midwestern states as Ohio lie within the geographic and cultural boundaries of the region. While these locales remain on the outer fringes of Appalachia, a significant minority of the population is comprised of first and second generation migrants from areas associated with what might be termed the "Appalachian Heartland"--such as southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky. Frequently, the persons these migrants encounter, while exhibiting numerous Appalachian characteristics, often identify themselves more with that of the state as a whole rather than with Appalachia. Yet, they repeatedly attempt to justify themselves if pointed out as being somewhat deviant from the rest of the state by saying, "we are different."

In 1965, a section of south and east Ohio consisting of twenty-eight counties became a legally constituted part of Appalachia as defined by the Apalachian Regional Commission. Most studies of the region, extending from that of John C.

Campbell's The Southern Highlander and His Homeland in 1921 to Thomas R. Ford's The Southern Appalachian Region in 1962, concentrated on describing that portion located south of the Mason-Dixon Line and the Ohio River. As a result of these and other studies, an emphasis on the southern and central portions of Appalachia has often been stressed to the near exclusion of the relevant parts of New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and sometimes even Maryland. Traditionally, at least, most of Ohio is generally viewed as part of the Midwest, or of the Corn Belt. More recently, the term "Rust Belt" has also been widely applied.

In 1976, sociologist Bruce Ergood of Ohio University surveyed "a significant portion of the rural population of the central Ohio 'Appalachian' region as to lifestyles, personal and family behavior patterns, attitudes and preferences." (1) Ergood compared his findings with the list of Appalachian characteristics created by Jack E. Weller in his widely-known book, Yesterday's People. Ergood concluded, "not surprisingly Ohioans, albeit included in the Appalachian region these past eight years, do not appear to be Apalachian using the Weller characterization." (2) Without providing a definitive answer to the question whether or not the people of southeastern Ohio are more Appalachian or Midwestern (or just plain rural), this study will consider the issue at some length and in some perspective.

This paper describes the development of an extensive Ohio Cooperative Extension Service program to be conducted in thirteen

Appalachian counties in southern Ohio by a district home economics specialist in 1989. These counties plus three others comprise the South District, extending from eastern counties of Athens and Meigs westward to Brown and Clinton, potential bedroom communities for the Greater Cincinnati area. The program deals with creating an awareness base of Appalachian culture characteristics in southern Ohioans. The purpose is to lay a framework of identity and image to help these southern Ohioans recognize what might make them different as they claim to be. This awareness and/or recognition of an Appalachian (or is it rural) identity has significant ramifications for Extension education programming in dealing with youth, adults, families, and communities.

In comparison with the rest of Ohio, the southeastern part is often typified as being different. Geographically, it is the unglaciated section of the Allegheny Plateau. A standard textbook reads, "below the glacial line lie the hill counties of the southeast, an old area much cut up by steams and marked by steep valleys and narrow ridges, often containing valuable coal deposits but of little use for agriculture. . . . much of the region is unsuited to any but the more primitive types of agriculture, familiarly called 'hill farming,' while some portions are not cultivated at all. (3)

Looking at the region from cultural and economic perspectives, observers have long noted differences between the

southeast and the remainder of the state which is considered more within the American mainstream. In 1919, a book appeared by Charles Otis Gill and Gifford Pinchot entitled Six Thousand Country Churches, published under the authority of the social gospel-oriented Federal Council of the Churchs of Christ in America. By and large, the book advocated consolidation and modernization of rural churches throughout the state at a time when Ohio's farm population had begun to decline. Two chapters of the book, however, focused on the problems of southeastern Ohio, or at least eighteen counties within it. While the authors never used the term Appalachia or highlander, they went into great detail describing many ways in which the area differed. Gill and Pinchot presented statistical data regarding substandard health conditions, high illegitimate birth rates, excessive illiteracy and farmland of low value. Although they described ro quaint cultural relics from the past, they did tend to indict the area rather harshly in general descriptive terms:

> Such statistical data as are here presented are but as smoke indicating fire. They do not overstate the urgency of the appeal from the unfortunae over-churched and under-ministered communities of this section. Here gross superstition exercises strong control over the thought and action of a large portion of the people. Syphilitic and other venereal diseases are common and increasing over whole counties, while in some communities nearly every family is afflicted with inherited or infectious disease. Many cases of incest are known, inbreeding is rife. Imbeciles, feeble-minded, and delinquents are numerous, politics is corrupt, the selling of votes is common, petty crimes abound, the schools have been badly managed and poorly attended. Cases

> of rape, assault, and robbery are of almost weekly occurrence within five minutes' walk of the corporation limits of one of the county seats, while in another county political control is held by a self-confessed criminal. Alcoholic intemperance is excessive. Gross immorality and its evil results are by no means confined to the hill districts, but are extreme also in the towns. (4)

Without ever linking southeastern Ohio to the southern highlands, Gill and Pinchot managed to discuss the area in terminology similar to those crusaders who sought to redeem the Appalachian mountaineers via the home mission and settlement school movement. In fact, Six Thousand Country Churches constituted as much of a "plea for home missions" as did the writings of William G. Frost and others of that ilk. Gill and Pinchot's observations may support the old adage--the more things change, the more they remain the same--because many of these circumstances continue to hold true.

Appalachian Ohio today is comprised of twenty-eight counties in the southeastern portion of the state, representing nearly one-third of the state's eighty-eight counties, but only slightly more than one-tenth of its population. The mean per capita nominal income for those counties is $9796 as compared with Ohio's mean of $12,052. This is the most densely forested part of the state plus the location of surface and underground coal mining. It is worth noting that the counties with the highest per capita nominal incomes are located on the outer fringe of the Appalachian region and probably exhibit the fewest Appalachian characteristics. For instance, Clermont County, with the highest

per capita nominal income of the twenty-eight, has become a virtual suburb of metropolitan Cincinnati. Furthermore, while the other twenty-seven counties have shown modest population increases or even decreases, Clermont's population has more than quadrupled since 1930.

Ohio University, located in Appalachian Athens County, Ohio, hosted a 20th-year commemorative anniversary conference of Ohio's War on Poverty in 1985. The conference reflected on accomplishments in the region which included (1) reversal in migration; (2) reduction in poverty; (3) significant improvement in educational attainment; (4) reduction in infant mortality; (5) expanded labor force expansion; and (6) expanded employment opportunities. Despite the significant progress determined and noted by those attending the conference (mainly "warrior types" from the Great Society's Poverty programs), unmet needs and service gaps were documented centering around unemployment, shortage of physicians, substandard and insufficient housing, and export of raw resources, among others. Ironically, it is not uncommon to hear from Extension personnel who work with people in community leadership roles as well as local government officials, community leaders, as well as just plain folks reflecting present-day concerns very similar to those noted as accomplishments at the 1985 conference. (5) Exporting our youth to areas of employment opportunities elsewhere is frequently cied as an undesirable characteristic of the region. Perhaps keeping these

youth at home where job opportunities are limited is more undesirable. Those who migrate frequently exhibit more ambition by leaving than those who stay, frequently personifying the Appalachian stereotype by ending up in a transfer-payment status. Recent poverty data studies indicate that poverty in Ohio's twenty-eight Appalachian counties increased 51% from 1980 to 1988. For example, consider Vinton County. It is the second smallest populated county in the state, the third poorest in per capita nominal income, and with the highest teenage pregnancy rate. This county is contiguous to Athens County, the home of Ohio University. The latest figures indicate a poverty rate in excess of 30% for Vinton County. (6)

A recommendation from the 1985 conference, Appalachia Ohio--Twenty Years Later--which has come to pass is the creation of the Governor's Office of Appalachia, complete with director and support staff, in the Ohio Department of Development. At least, now the southeastern portion of the state is receiving a bit of attention and rhetoric regarding economic development and hopefully an accompanying improvement in quality of life, more in a self-help context. Maybe this approach will work, for as Richard Drake in Mountaineers and Americans said, "the War on Poverty seems to have had relatively little long-range effect in Appalachia." (7)

An issue highlighted from this conference pinpointed the "different-ness" of this part of the state by expressing that "it

is important to continue to look at the Apalachian region as a unique area and to tailor solutions accordingly. . . . the unique aspects of the Appalachian culture, topography and economy served a a backdrop for discussions about where the region stands today and where it is headed in the future. Strategies and programs that are developed to deal with social and economic problems statewide or nationwide may not get at the issues that are found in Appalachia." (8)

What about the people living in Appalachian Ohio? They are representative of the region of contrasts ranging from the native-born whose ancestors pioneered the area; East-South European ethnic folks, especially along the eastern portion of the state; persons with Ohio River culture influence; people proud of their Welsh heritage, particularly in Gallia and Jackson Counties; immigrants from more southern and heartland Appalachian states like Kentucky and West Virginia; more cosmopolitan-type immigrants including some flower children from the '60s who truly did enjoy getting back to naure and stayed; and combinations thereof. There is becoming noticed a small, but concentrated influx of Japanese as several small, new automotive supply industries are opening in the region. There is a small Black population scattered throughout the region, but the 1980 Census data records the Appalachian part of Ohio as predominately White. No wonder it is difficult to recognize an Appalachian identity! What is even worse is the lack of identity or self

image claimed by those who are native. A Vinton County homemaker summed it up when she said, "we really aren't clods, but we aren't anything else either." This lack of identity was further demonstrated through a recent Vinton County cooperative craft marketing venture in Dublin, suburban Columbus, Ohio. It was not successful and the nail was probably hit on the head when an Ohio State University Community Development Extension Specialist remarked that at the Appalachian Gift Gallery shoppers expected "authentic" Appalachian arts and crafts with fiddle music playing in the background. The arts and crafts displayed were the same as everyone else makes. The negative images of Appalachia labeled "hillbilly," "hick," "redneck," and so on are not conducive to taking pride in the heritage skills that we sometimes try to bury under the quilts and hide with rag rugs. But the Vinton County Economic Development Cooperative learned from this experience, for it said that someone appreciated those heritage skills and maybe they themselves should also.

Heritage, culture, and values play important roles in attitude toward economic development opportunities and potential for quality of life improvements. We know that the market is intensively competitive for Japanese industry. Special classes and workshops are being held on understanding Japanese culture which is the framework in which they operate for business dealings. This training is going on in Appalachian Ohio, also. But have we Appalachian natives studies ourselves to determine

the framework, often labeled the "good old boy system," out of which we operate? This writer contends we have not.

For the purpoess of this particular study, the writer has accepted Loyal Jones' pattern of Appalachian values (and described by J. Wayne Flynt in Dixie's Forgotten People) rather than those of Weller, probably because they more readily fit her sense of Appalachian identity. Sense of place is strong and land ownership is important. Place to Vinton Countians is even more specific than county. It is not atypical to hear them respond to "where are you from" with Allensville, Skunk Hollow, Jimtown,or Locust Grove Ridge, rather than saying "Vinton County" to outsiders. Indpendence, self reliance, and pride can be seen in the context described by Jones as can personalism, neighborliness, and hospitality--with each other--although we are accused, and rightly so, of being unfriendly to strangers and outsiders. (9) Although there is migration, especially of youth upon high school graduation, some folks do not get too far out of the region. School teachers talk of taking Vinton County elementary students to Columbus on field trips and describe their enamor with the escalators which they repeatedly ride. This fascination can be understood when knowing that there are no escalators in Vinton County or in any other surrounding it.

Familism is important. In fact, in Vinton County, immigrants learn quickly and/or painfully that you do not talk

about someone without knowing for sure they are not related to each other or to a friend. That non-kinship native is hard to find. Immigrants also soon realize that they will always be outsiders even if they spend the rest of their lives in the community. This may even extend to immigrants from other parts of Appalachia although Sarah Coleman says that when she and her husband moved into Richland Township, Vinton County, in December 1945 from Pike County, Kentucky, they found people to be just like themselves and were treated and accepted all right. More Colemans soon followed to buy Vinton County hill land for farming because it was better than what they had left back home. Work opportunities were better, too, and Mr. Coleman spent his working years at a local brick plant. Mrs. Coleman relates that her husband, Ulysses, selected his Ohio home because he wanted to live in a place "where the rocks didn't roll on his feet." A sizable Coleman family still resides in Vinton County in addition to several Floyd County, Kentucky families who have become a part of the community over the years. In fact, Willie Hale, a farmer, served three terms as county commissioner while Edwin Reffett was narrowly defeated twice in races for State Representative. Mr. Reffett later served as county superintendent of schools, then moved on to a similar position in Brown County (also in Appalachian Ohio) from which he has retired. Familism, kinship ties, and traditions can be further exemplified through the number of and well-attended family reunions, community church

homecomings, festivals, fish frys, bean dinners, and such gatherings which are held on a regular, annual basis and draw migrants "back home" to visit kith and kin.

Language my be an obvious indication to make someone think we may be different in southern Ohio. With some there is a noticeable southern drawl while in more of us we call it just a plain old southern Ohio brogue. Paper placemats recently used in a Vinton County restaurant contained some typical expressions of "Mountain Talk." Of the thirty-seven words or phrases described, twenty-six of them are either in this writer's own working vocabulary or heard not infrequently spoken by others, especially by old-timers in the community. Country music historian, Dr. Ivan M. Tribe, has an accent that Ohio University tried in vain to eradicate through five semesters of remedial speech classes, but he resisted giving up this part of his identity. (10) Patsy Stoneman of the famous musical Stoneman Family says that Ivan sounds like Uncle Eck Dunford, a noted musician and storyteller from Galax, Virginia. While the writer taught school in northern Ohio near Toledo, students remarked tht she sounded like she was from the South and were particularly amused with her use of the word "reckon." This lends credence to Helen Lewis' observation that Appalachian people have the ability to assimilate the larger culture if they will, due to being exposed to values of the greater society as well as to their own heritage. They choose values they wish to incorporate into their lives, being ready to

accept alternate sets if they should prove more appropriate. (11)

In her article, "Cultural Values Influencing Educational Programming in West Virginia," Betty P. Crickard reports that "evidence indicates the Appalachian culture continues to persist in varying degrees throughout the region and failure to recognize this has contributed to ineffectual social and educational programming." (12) Loyal Jones elaborates when he relates that some of these Appalachian values and beliefs are a disadvantage to us when they keep us from putting our best foot forward and sometimes from putting either foot forward:

> Our fatalistic religious attitudes often cause us to adopt a "what will be will be" approach to social problems. Our Original Sin orientation inhibits us from trying to change the nature or practices of people. Our individualism keeps us from getting involved, from creating a sense of community and cooperation and causes us to shy away from those who want to involve us in social causes. Our love of place sometimes keeps us in places where there is no hope of maintaining decent lives. We have been so involved with persons that we have not taken proper notice of ideas and organizations which are important to us in today's society. We have been hospitable and neighborly to strangers who have deceived us over and over again. We have been modest and retiring, and thus have let others from the outside do thejobs we should have been doing ourselves, only to find that usually they have not done what we wanted done. Finally, we have been so close to the frontier with its exploitive mentality, that we have seen our resources squandered, and we have seen our neighbors exploited without our giving these acts much thought. Our sense of freedom has bordered on license, and we have thrown our trash all over the mountains and into our streams, adding to the pollution from strip mining and industrial waste. In our modest way, we have watched, have not accepted responsibility, and problems have closed in on us.

Change will not come easily and will not come at all unless the

reasons for change are found and are desired by mountain people. (13)

Until the last few months, this writer was unaware of a book written in 1971 by Photiadis and Schwarzweller, Change in Rural Appalachia: Implications for Action Programs, challenging the Extension Service in particular to work as a change agent in an Appalachian context to bring about more effective results. With Ohio's twenty-eight Appalachian counties served by nearly sixty Extension agents, it might appear that special training would be offered to sensitize agents for working as educators dealing with change in an Appalachian-like region. This training emphasis has not occurred during the writer's fourteen years with the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service. Instead, there seems to be an emphasis on finding similarities rather than dealing with differences even in light of obvious geographical distinctions. Hearing several agents refer to some people they work with as "rednecks," causes the hair to bristle on this red-necked agent's neck! Crickard's research dealt with the "proposition that a major reason that programs designed to cure the ills of poverty in Appalachia did not meet with success is because they were imposed upon the people and not developed in the cultural context of their culture and its values. Only when developed in the cultural context at the level of the people will programs possess the potential for long term corrective action." (14) Selz C. Mayo in his article, "Some Observations on Planning Effective

Programs of Directed Change in Rural Appalachia," quotes a statement written and published in 1935 from a research monograph which is as suitable today as it was in 1935 or when he quoted it in 1971:

> The rehabilitation of this vast cultural area offers a greater task than does any of the five other [rural] areas as it will involve (1) the moving of families from submarginal lands, (2) the regulation of the commercial exploitation of the area's natural resources so as to insure their orderly development, (3) the development of forests and recreational areas, and (4) the extension of educational opportunities. (15)

Stanley O. Ikenberry says "but as has been demonstrated in the past, the world won't stand still for the state and region to catch up. Appalachian people neither want nor could they attain an isolation from the realities and pressures of modernization which surround them. With increased mobility, improved communications, and a shifting job structure, the region is caught up in a national and international system which is generating tremendous changes in the region's economy, politics, and among other aspects of life, education." (16) Roman J. Verhaalen tells that "because of its earlier isolation, largely the result of an extremely rugged topography and concomitantly poor transportation and communication facilities, rural Appalachia is undoubtedly changing faster and experiencing greater internal as well as external pressure to change than perhaps any other rural region in America today." (17) Therefore, "it appears essential that agencies of directed change like the Extension Service in rural Appalachia explore new goals

and new methods for implementing their programs if they wish to serve better the people in this region," according to Mayo. (18)

With the support of the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service home economics program leader, district supervisor, subject matter specialists, and others, the writer has developed an introductory level presentation called "Appalachian Cultural Awareness in Southern Ohio." It is designed to answer the questions, "Where is Appalachia and how do you know if you are in it?" "Who are Appalachians and how do you know if you are one?" And finally, "Why do we want to know and what will we do after finding out?" A survey instrument accompanying the presentation provides for data collection regarding locus of origin, attitudes and values according to Jones' pattern, knowledge of Appalachia, and satisfaction with community. This does not represent a study in the strictest sense as those surveyed will be people who attend this Extension-sponsored program throughout the South District. Efforts are being made to include both youth and adults and all four program areas--agriculture, home economics, 4-H, and community and naural resources development--representing an issue-based approach to dealing with national initiatives of building human capital and rural revitalization. As a result of this program effort, desired outcomes include: (1) data to determine whether or not Appalachian culture characteristics exist in Extension clientele to a noticeable degree to influence programming in the South District; (2) data to warrant extending

awareness program to the East District, comprised of thirteen Appalachian-designated counties, to determine if Appalachian culture characteristics exist there; (3) implications to share in a report with Extension administration and program leaders as well as regional state legislators regarding the "different-ness" (or lack thereof) in Appalachian Ohioans; (5) and using Crickard's recommendations that "training be designed to fit educational programs into the cultural context of clientele. . . in the identification and understanding of the heterogeneous character of the Appalachian subculture, and development of respect and appreciation for Appalachian cultural values." (19)

Whether or not there are any others in Appalachian Ohio, the writer has discovered and acknowledges as a result of this project that the sub-culture in which she was reared has and does influence her outlook toward life even taking into consideration advanced education, out migration for a time, and working in a community leadership role. As Loyal Jones says in his introduction to Reshaping the Image of Appalachia, "this region is so varied one can find something to support whatever image or stereotype that is lodged in one's head." (20) Perhaps that is the case here also, but the writer is looking forward to more opportunities like that portrayed in Kenneth Murray's A Portrait of Appalachia when he quotes, "What some folks don't seem to realize is that sitting on the front porch IS doing something." (21)

FOOTNOTES

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2. Ibid.

3. Eugene H. Roseboom and Francis P. Weisenburger, A History of Ohio (Columbus: The Ohio Historical Society, 1969), pp. 3-4.

4. Charles Otis Gill and Gifford Pinchot, Six Thousand Country Churches (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), pp. 12-39.

5. Appalachia Ohio--Twenty Years Later Conference Report, 1985.

6. Athens Messenger, January 1, 1989.

7. Richard B. Drake, Mountaineers and Americans (n. p., n. p.,) 1976), p. 70.

8. Appalachia Ohio--Twenty Years Later.

9. Loyal Jones, "Appalachian Values," in Voices From the Hills (New York, 1975), pp. 507-517; J. Wayne Flynt, Dixie's Forgotten People (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 125-161.

10. Jim Wayne Miller, "Appalachian Education: A Critique and Suggestions for Reform," Appalachian Journal 5 (Autumn 1977), p. 16.

11. H. Lewis as quoted in Betty P. Crickard, "Cultural Values Influencing Educational Programming in West Virginia," (West Virginia, 1974), p. 3.

12. Betty P. Crickard, "Cultural Values Influencing Educational Programming in West Virginia, p. 1.

13. Loyal Jones, "Appalachian Values," p. 160-161.

14. Betty P. Crickard, "Cultural Values Influencing Educational Programming in West Virginia," p. 1.

15. Selz C. Mayo, "Some Observations on Planning Effective Programs of Directed Change in Rural Appalachia," in John D. Photiadis and Harry K. Schwarzweller, Change in Rural Appalachia: Implications for Action Programs (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 221.

16. Stanley O. Ikenberry, "Educational Reform in Appalachia: Problems of Relevance, Strategy and Priority," in Photiadis and Schwarzweller, Change in Rural Appalachia, p. 205.

17. Roman J. Verhaalen, "Programs of Directed Change in an Era of Social Reorganization: The Case of Extension," in Photiadis and Schwarzweller, Change in Rural Appalachia, p. 183.

18. Selz C. Mayo, "Some Observations on Planning Effective Programs of Directed Change in Rural Appalachia," p. 223.

19. Betty P. Crickard, "Cultural Values Influencing Educational Programming in West Virginia," n. p.

20. Loyal Jones, Reshaping the Image of Appalachia (Berea: The Berea College Appalachian Center, 1986), p. 1.

21. Kenneth Murray, A Portrait of Appalachia (Boone: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1985), p. 59.

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